

Dear Sylvia,

7TH NOVEMBER, 1945.

I KNOW YOU ALL ARE INTERESTED IN MY TRIP TO THE STATES SO I DECIDED TO ADOPT THIS METHOD OF TELLING YOU ALL ABOUT IT. HERE GOES.

WHEN I GOT TO WELLINGTON I WAS PRETTY MUCH EXHAUSTED AS YOU MAY IMAGINE, AND THAT TRIP CERTAINLY DOES NOT IMPROVE WITH TIME! I ARRIVED AT YOUR FAIR CAPITAL AT APPROX. 7 A.M. AND MOOCHED AROUND THE CITY UNTIL 4 P.M. WHEN WE ALL HAD TO BOARD SHIP. I HAD A DEVIL OF A TIME GETTING MY LUGGAGE AND WAS UNHAPPILY ON THE GLASGOW WHARF WAITING FOR IT TO ARRIVE FROM 9.30 UNTIL 1.30 SO YOU CAN GUESS MY RED HEADED TEMPER WAS NOT IMPROVED BY THIS.

WE BOARDED, AS I HAVE ALREADY STATED AT 4 P.M. AND WE WERE ALL QUITE HAPPY UNTIL WE SAW OUR ACCOMMODATION. I WAS IN A CABIN WITH 22 OTHER FEMALES AND SIX CHILDREN. AFTER THIS TRIP I DECIDED THAT ANY CHILDREN EVER HAD WOULD BE SOUNDPROOF!

THE LIMEY STEWARDS WERE QUITE NICE - NOT WHAT I EXPECTED, ALTHOUGH HALF THE TIME THEIR DIALECT AMUSED AND CONFUSED US. THE FOOD, TO MY MIND, LITERALLY STUNK, CONSISTING MAINLY OF POWDERED STUFF - MILK, CUSTARD, AND EVEN THE ICE CREAM. MOST VEGETABLES WERE OF THE CANNED VARIETY. I ALSO THINK WE HAD OUR TABLE CLOTHS CHANGED ONLY ONCE DURING THE VOYAGE, WHICH, INCIDENTALLY, TOOK 3 WEEKS, SO YOU CAN SEE THAT HYGIENE WAS NOT EXACTLY THE UPPERMOST THOUGHTS OF OUR STEWARDS.

MOST OF OUR GIRLS WERE PUT DOWN ON "D" DECK, WHICH I WAS LATER ADVISED WAS USUALLY RESERVED FOR PLAIN STEERAGE IN NORMAL TIMES. APPROX. 10 OF THE BRIDES MANAGED TO GET INTO CABINS. HOW THEY DID IT STILL REMAINS A MYSTERY TO MY DULL BUT ENVIOUS MIND.

OF COURSE, AS USUAL, MANY WILD RUMOURS CIRCULATED THE SHIP. COULD YOU EVER IMAGINE A SHIP CONTAINING SCUMMY AMERICAN BRIDES THAT DIDN'T HAVE ANY GOSSIP? I THINK YOU WILL KNOW WHAT I MEAN, YOU YANKEE SYMPATHISERS! ONE OF THE UPPERMOST RUMOURS WAS THAT A LOT OF THE BRIDES WOULD GO ON TO THE U.K. WHAT A LOT OF BUNKUM! THIS WAS ALL IN AID OF THE FACT THAT SOME OF THE GIRLS SPOKE TO SOME OF THE LIMEYS AND IT BEATS ME, BECAUSE ONE COULDN'T HELP BEING ON A VESSEL OF THE LIKE OF THE RANGITIKI FOR 21 DAYS WITHOUT TALKING TO SOMEONE. ONE OF THE STEWARDS DID PROPOSE TO ONE OF THE FIANCES ON THE SHIP BUT AS YOU CAN GUESS, GOT EXACTLY NOWHERE!

ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING ENTERTAINMENTS, TO MY MIND, WAS THE HORSE RACING THEY HAD ON BOARD. SOME OF YOU MAY KNOW JUST WHAT I AM REFERRING TO, OTHERS MAY NOT HAVE HEARD OF IT. WELL, HERE IT IS.

A "COURSE" WAS LAID OUT ON THE DECK, COMPOSED OF SIX LINES GOING LENGTHWISE AND HAVING ABOUT 24 SQUARES. AT THE BEGINNING OF EACH OF THE SIX LINES WAS PLACED A "HORSE". THE HORSES, INCIDENTALLY, WERE ONLY WOODEN HEADS ON A STICK, AND WERE "RACED" OR MORE LIKELY LED BY SIX GIRL VOLUNTEER "JOCKEYS". THEN TWO HUGE RUBBER DICE WERE THROWN BY TWO GIRLS, IN SEPARATE WIRE BASKETS. ONE NUMBER THROWN WOULD BE FOR THE NUMBER OF THE HORSE, THEN THE OTHER NUMBER THROWN WOULD BE FOR THE NUMBER OF SQUARES - VIZ. A FIVE THROWN FIRST WOULD INDICATE NO. 5 HORSE, THEN THE OTHER NUMBER WOULD BE THE NUMBER OF SQUARES NO. 5 HORSE WOULD BE ALLOWED TO PROGRESS ON THE COURSE.

I THOROUGHLY ENJOYED THIS AND WON ABOUT 15/- AT IT.

ANOTHER POPULAR FORM OF AMUSEMENT WAS THE OLD GAME OF "HOUSY" AND MY GIRL FRIEND WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO WIN 25S.0D FOR 3D. AT IT.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION I WAS NOT SEASICK, ALTHOUGH SEVERAL GIRLS WERE.

VALDA PAINE (MRS. FRANKLIN TO SOME OF YOU) WAS PUT IN HOSPITAL FOR APENDICITIS BUT EVENTUALLY GOT ON LAND WITHOUT LOSING IT. ANOTHER WILD RUMOUR WENT AROUND THAT ONE OF THE GIRLS HAD HAD A BABY ON BOARD. THAT WAS ONE OF THE MOST RIDICULOUS BITS OF GOSSIP I HEARD. POOR GIRL WAS 6 MONTHS PREGNANT AND, AS SHE WAS NOT FEEDING UP TO THE MARK, SHE WAS PUT IN SICK BAY SO THAT SHE COULD BE PROPERLY LOOKED AFTER. I AM SURE NO ONE WOULD HAVE BEEN MORE SURPRISED THAN SHE TO KNOW SHE HAD ALREADY HAD HER BABY.

THERE WAS ONE WIFE WITH TWO BABIES, AND BELIEVE ME I DON'T KNOW HOW SHE MANAGED THEM, AS MOST GIRLS SEEMED TO HAVE TROUBLE MANAGING ONE. ESPECIALLY WHEN DIARRHEA (SP?) BECAME PREVALENT. BEING OF THE CONSTIPATED VARIETY, I WAS COMPLETELY IMMUNE.

AFTER ABOUT 4 DAYS OUT AT SEA, THE WEATHER GRADUALLY BECAME HOTTER AND HOTTER, UNTIL YOURS TRULY BECAME USED TO SLEEPING IN A LITERAL BED OF PERSPIRATION - SLEEPING IN THE NUDE AND COVERED WITH ONLY ONE SHEET. HAD TO BE CAREFUL THAT I WAS STILL COVERED IN THE MORNING AS OUR MAN STEWARD USED TO COME IN AT 7.0 O'CLOCK TO WAKE US. I STILL CAN HEAR HIS EARLY MORNING REVILLE OF "WAKEE! WAKEE!"

ANOTHER THING THAT TICKED ME WAS ANOTHER STEWARD WHO USED TO COME AROUND TO CALL US FOR THE VARIOUS SITTINGS FOR MEALS. MOTHERS AND THEIR KIDS WENT TO THE FIRST SITTING AND WE OTHERS TO THE SECOND SITTING. ANYWAY, THIS OLD BOY WOULD COME AROUND CRYING "ANY MORE FOR SECOND SITTING" AND ALWAYS LEAVE OFF THE LAST CONSONANT, AND DURING THE WHOLE 3 WEEKS I NEVER ONCE HEARD HIM SAY THIS CORRECTLY.

I WENT TO A CHURCH SERVICE ON BOARD, WHICH WAS A VERY SIMPLE AFFAIR AND TOOK APPROX. 20 MINUTES. THE CAPTAIN CONDUCTED THE SERVICE BY READING A SMALL PIECE OUT OF THE BIBLE AND FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE SESSION HYMS WERE SUNG. I WAS ADVISED THAT ON NO SHIP DOES THE CAPTAIN PREACH A SERMON. THE SAME THING, I SUPPOSE, AS THE FACT THAT RELIGION AND POLITICS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO BE DISCUSSED ON A SHIP AMONGST THE MEN. JUST AS WELL I SUPPOSE, AS ANY OPEN DISCUSSIONS ON THESE MATTERS MIGHT LEAD TO A SMALL CIVIL WAR.

THINK WE CROSSED THE EQUATOR ABOUT THE 17TH OCTOBER, AND FORTUNATELY NO TRICKS WERE PLAYED. IT WAS HOT ENOUGH WITHOUT BEING FURTHER TORTURED. SOME OF THE GIRLS SAW A FEW WHALES BUT BEING OF THE UNOBSERVANT VARIETY I DIDN'T, ALTHOUGH I SAW QUITE A LOT OF FLYING RMX FISH.

ROUND ABOUT THE 18TH OCTOBER OR 20TH, WE WERE ADVISED THAT WE WOULD NOT BE STAYING AT PANAMA AS PLANNED, BUT THAT WE WOULD ALL LAND AT BALBOA AND THEN GO DIRECT BY BUS TO CHRISTOBOL WHERE AN AMERICAN TRANSPORT WOULD BE AWAITING US. AS I GOT OFF THE "GANGE PLANKS" I WAS THRILLED TO RECEIVE A LETTER FROM MARIE, THAT CUTE LITTLE FRECKLED PAL OF MINE. AS WE GOT OFF, WE WERE WELCOMED (AND I MEAN WELCOMED) BY THE RED CROSS, WHO ESCORTED US INTO THE BUSES AND HANDED SANDWICHES, CAKES AND DRINKS TO US THROUGH THE WINDOWS. THE SCENERY FROM BALBOA TO CHRISTOBOL EVEN BY NIGHT WAS PRETTY AND WE PASSED THROUGH SOME JUNGLE ON THE WAY. ALSO WE SAW ABOUT 3 BIG NIGHT CLUBS THERE AND BOY! WOULDNT I HAVE LIKED TO DROP OFF FOR A WHISKEY AND SODA! DO I SHOCK YOU? I THOUGHT NOT!

WE ALSO SAW A LOT OF HOUSES ON THE WAY AND I THOUGHT THEM VERY BEAUTIFUL - THEY WERE MAINLY LARGE TWO-STOreyED BUILDINGS WITH KIND OF FINE NETS AT THE WINDOWS TO KEEP OUT THE INSECTS. ALSO WE SAW SOME ARMY BARRACKS, WHICH LOOKED TO BE FINE, CLEAN PLACES TO LIVE IN. I CERTAINLY WOULDN'T MIND TAKING A HOLIDAY DOWN THERE.

AS YOU KNOW, WE DIDN'T GO VIA THE CANAL, AFTER ALL. I WAS A BIT DISAPPOINTED AS I WAS TOLD IT WAS A MARVELLOUS EXPERIENCE TO GO THROUGH THE LOCKS, BUT WE DID SEE A BIT OF THE CANAL, AS WE DROVE ALONG SIDE OF THEM. PROBABLY TAKE THE RANGITIKI ABOUT 24 HOURS TO GO THROUGH.

AT CHRISTOBUL WE WERE AGAIN GREETED BY THE AMERICAN CROSS ON THE WHARF, TO WHICH WE WERE DRIVEN IN THE BUSES. THEY WERE READY WITH HOT COFFEE, CANDY, SANDWICHES AND CIGS. AND STRETCHERS WERE LAID OUT FOR ALL THE 36 BABIES. IT WAS ABOUT 11 O'CLOCK AT NIGHT THEN SO AS YOU CAN IMAGINE, THE BEDS WERE TAKEN FULL ADVANTAGE OF BY THE MOTHERS, AS WE HAD TO STAND FIRST IN ONE QUEUE AND THEN ANOTHER. MY FRIEND AND I FINALLY BOARDED THE AMERICAN SHIP "FLORIDA" AT 3 O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING AND WE WERE, BY THAT TIME, TOO TIRED TO SLEEP.

THE FOOD AND ACCOMMADATION ON THE YANKEE SHIP WAS DEFINITELY BETTER THAN THAT GIVEN US ON THE ENGLISH SHIP, ALTHOUGH THE BATHING FACILITIES WERE FAR WORSE (AND THE RANGITIKI WAS PRETTY BAD IN THIS RESPECT). THE AMERICAN SHIP HAD AN EXCUSE FOR THIS THOUGH, AS NORMALLY ONLY OVER-NIGHT TRIPS WERE MADE, SOMETHING LIKE A TRIP IN THE GOOD OLD WAHENE ON THE WELLINGTON-CHRISTCHURCH RUN. ON MONDAY (23RD OCTER, I THINK) THE SHIP DOCKED AT NEW ORLEANS, ON THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER AND AN OLD RED CROSS LADY TOLD ME THAT CARL HAD GIVEN HER A LIFT DOWN ONE OF THE MAIN N.ORLEANS STREETS AS A BRIBE TO TELL ME THAT HE WOULD BE WAITING ON THE WHARF FOR ME - I HAD CABLED HIM FROM CHRISTOBUL FOUR DAYS BEFORE REACHING N.ORLEANS.

I WAS LOOKING OUT FOR A CIVILIAN FROM MY POINT OF OBSERVATION ON THE SHIP AND WAS AMAZED TO SEE HIS LONG LANKY FORM CLAD IN DRILL UNIFORM AND LOOKING AS SINISTER AND EVIL AS EVER. GIRLS WITH HUSBANDS WAITING FOR THEM ON THE WHARF WERE IMMEDIATELY ALLOWED OFF SHIP, AFTER GOING THROUGH THE NECESSARY IMMIGRATION RED TAPE, SO YOURS TRULY DIDN'T WASTE ANY TIME! AFTER FIXING UP THE LUGGAGE WE WENT ON TO THE HOTEL ROOSEVELT, ONE OF THE BEST HOTELS IN N.ORLEANS AND I AM NOT SKITING, WHERE WE STAYED FOR ONE WEEK. WE WENT SHOPPING AND I MEAN WE. CARL DEMANDED TO SEE EVERYTHING I TRIED ON AND WOULD LET ME PURCHASE NOTHING UNLESS HE APPROVED. MIGHTY DIFFICULT GETTING CLOTHES TO FIT ME AS I TAKE A SIZE 9 OVER HERE, WHICH IS EQUIVALENT TO GUESS WHAT IN N.Z. O.K. I WILL TELL YOU - MAID'S SIZE.

Meant to tell you before. Coming over in the "Florida" I saw a good film - "Rhapsody in Blue". Don't miss this movie if you can help it. It is about the life of George Gershwin. Damn good.

Saw a couple of pictures on the "Rangitiki" but the projector was so bad that after the movie we all rushed to the bill board to see who had been the actors.

It was rather a thrill to come up the Mississippi River, kids. Brought back to my mind the days of Mark Twain. The M. River is terribly muddy and I was told that it never is clear. Rather pretty though, as although it is so dirty looking, it is banked by weeping willows.

New Orleans is a gorgeous city - plenty of life, plenty of good stores, restaurants (good ones) bars, night clubs and theatres. The theatres here run continuous sessions and it is not uncommon to see piles of people waiting at the back of the movie house, until some of the crowd have caught up on the part of the film they have not seen. One night we went to a grill room in one of the suburbs that fringe the city and had steak and french fried onions. Boy! What a steak - 3 times the size of N.Z. steak and very delicious. After coffee, we were served some drinks. Drinks are served in any place in any state that is not "dry". How about that?

The Roosevelt Hotel is a huge hotel - having about 14 floors. It is very luxurious and has a dance room and cocktail bar besides the ordinary lounge. Also besides several rooms for social functions, there was a radio station working in the Hotel. Was funny to sit listening to the radio in our room and realize that the same was broadcasting from the same hotel. It was really nice there; we always had music with our meals as the hotel had a hired orchestra.

From N. Orleans we drove up to West Virginia, stopping at small places as we went. We did this as Carl wanted me to get used to small towns. On this motor journey we went through Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee (sp?). Must say Tennessee is a pretty state and very fertile. Whilst there went to see the Tennessee Valley project which is a very powerful power plant and supplied the electricity to most war industries in the state. It is just a great artificial lake to look at.

Bluefield, W. Virginia, is a very small place, about the size of Auckland and very pretty and prosperous. Main industry is coal production. The coal fields are a few miles out of the town. I have not seen them yet. Bluefield is situated up in the mountains and the air being very different from what I am accustomed to. I felt terribly sleepy for a few days. At least I blamed it on the air. Population of this town is 35,000. There is a terrible amount of cars here - and negroes. Carl's people, with whom we are living until we build a home, have a coloured maid. Believe me she is pretty smart and has had a college education, so don't get the impression that most negroes are numskulled. And I was told that most negroes nowadays, whether they have money or not, send their kids on to college. They are expected to pay as much for their education as they can afford and any deficit is met by the tax-payers. However, the negroes are kept pretty much under control, poor devils, but I suppose they would have to be.

Carl's people are very sweet and very hospitable. Every second word is "honey this" and so on. Can't get used to the women's voices though. Carl's mother speaks softly but most of the women one hears in restaurants and such like are a bit raucous. Kids over here aren't kids at all though, but old men and women. Don't seem to have the childhood they have in N.Z.

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Was told a funny story about Carl to-day. When he was 3 he often used to go across the road to play with J.Jnr. who was 2½. One day after Carl was washed and dressed up to go and buy himself some ice-cream, his mother let him out the gate to go up the store at the top of the street. Carl, as soon as he gained his freedom went over to J.Jnrs. At the time of his arrival, J.Jnr. was in his bath tub, half bathed, and his mother was at the moment out of the room to get a towel. Carl helped Jnr. out of the washtub and led him by the hand up to the store. Jnr. of course, was stark naked and Carl togged up to the nines. Round about the time the strange duet reached the top of the street, Carl's father drove by in his car, just in time to sight the pair and see a frantic female dashing in hot pursuit!

Well, kids, I have run out of news for just now, so write soon and I will do likewise.

Love to all,

Lesly.

Write : - Mrs. Lesly Dawson (to avoid confusion)
824 College Avenue, Bluefield,
West Virginia, U.S.A.

I did this letter with carbons. Flatter yourself, kid, that you got one of the originals!

Write me, you jerk, & tell me what you are doing. Everything - leaving out none of the gory details!

How is Frizzy Lizz at the office. Is she still pining over her Yankee lover?

Listen, babe, I owe you a pair of Nylon stockings & L2. Nylons will be in in approx. 2 months' time. What do you want me to do with the L2? Could send you cash, if you like, as I have plenty. But, on the other hand, you might like me to get you some underclothing over here. Most of it is pretty reasonably priced. Will send you the Nylons as soon as I can get them. But you advise me about the